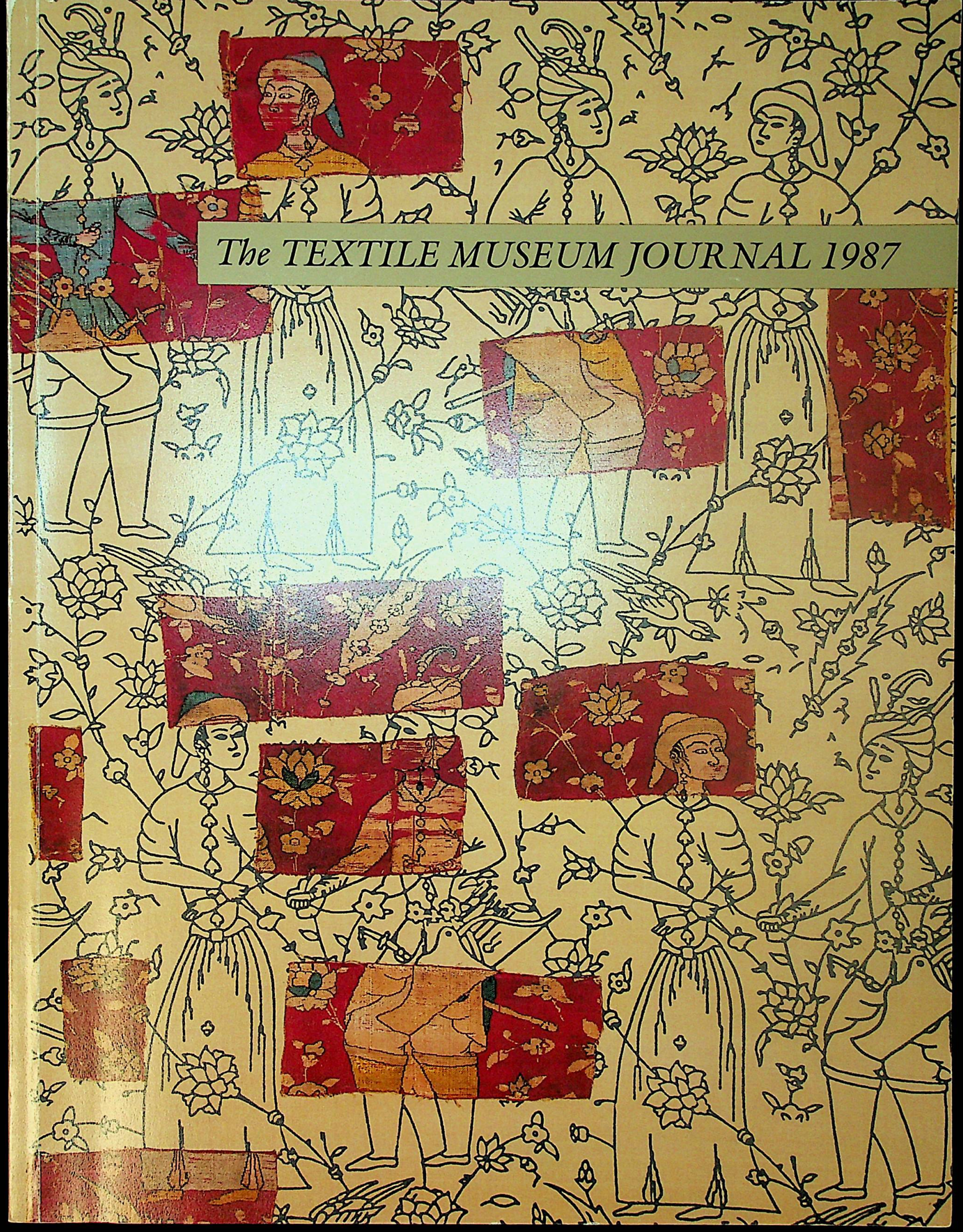
# *The TEXTILE MUSEUM JOURNAL 1987*



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*Silk textile fragments, See Mary Anderson McWilliams, "Prisoner Imagery in Safavid Textiles," Fig. 9*
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*Edward Owen*

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# *COSTUME and CEREMONIAL TEXTILES of BHUTAN*

*Diana K. Myers*

## *Introduction*

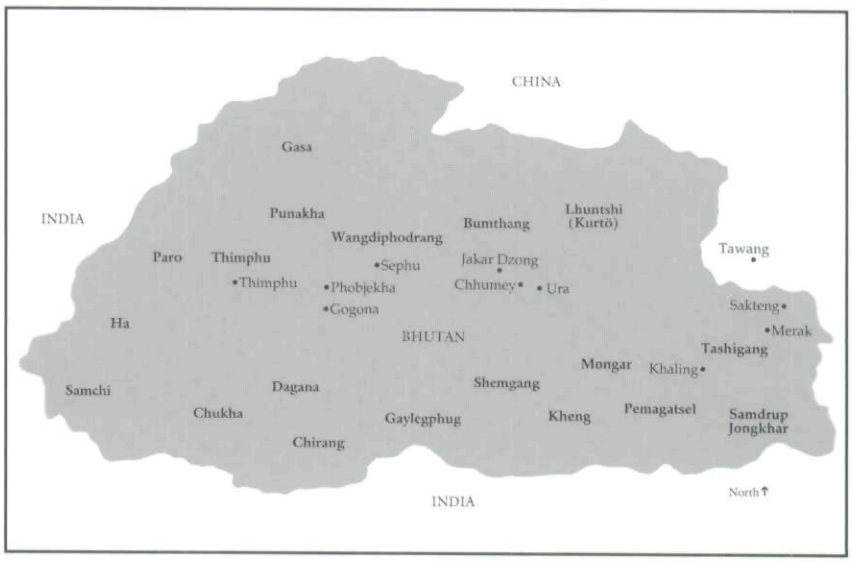
The remote Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan is often described by Westerners as a placid oasis of traditional culture untouched by the outside world. Because Western scholarship on Bhutan is limited, however, this impression—at least with respect to weaving and textiles—deserves scrutiny.[1] Rural life today may be much the same as when it was first observed by Europeans in the 1600s and 1700s, but changes in fashion, in availability of dyes, and in preferred fibers have occurred since then. Economic and societal changes are underway in Bhutan even now. Where spinning, dyeing, and weaving were, until recently, major activities of most women in central and eastern districts, many young girls are now attending school. Women who do weave often favor labor-saving commercial yarns. Furthermore, with the increasing use of currency, the role of textiles in ceremonial gift-giving has diminished and their function as a mode of tax payment has vanished altogether.

The prevalence of indigenous dress is often cited as a sign of Bhutan's enduring traditions[2], but popular costume also illustrates the evolutionary nature of local handloom work. Certain styles of men's and women's dress, for example, seem to have changed in the nineteenth century, at which time the use of nettle fiber for clothing also became virtually obsolete. Recent innovations are seen in women's accessories, some of which, like belts, have entirely new patterns, shapes, and structures. Among the most notable features of modern Bhutan, nevertheless, are the widespread production of diverse textiles used in everyday life and the prestige accorded to expert weavers. Some contemporary men's robes and women's wraparound garments do show synthetic fibers and bright dyes, but most are still handwoven. The splendid variety of textiles seen in Bhutan today, including those that reflect changing tastes or incorporate newly-introduced materials, is evidence of the vitality, rather than the stasis, of the country's distinctive weaving traditions.

Bhutanese textiles remain little known outside the Himalayas, despite the recent publication of three books on the subject. Barbara Adams' *Traditional Bhutanese Textiles* (Bangkok: White Orchid Press; 1984) and Mark Bartholomew's *Thunder Dragon Textiles from Bhutan* (Kyoto: Shikosha Publishing Co.; 1985) are primarily valuable for their plentiful illustrations of the authors' collections, which contain superb examples of weaving from central and eastern Bhutan. Bartholomew provides some technical descriptions and an introduction to looms and designs as well. In David Barker's *Designs of Bhutan* (Bangkok: White Lotus Co.,

*Left:*
*Fig. 4*
*Bhutanese women wear a blouse* (wonju) *under their dress* (kira), *and over the dress a jacket* (tögo). *This woman attending a festival has a ceremonial sash* (adha rachung *pattern*) *folded and draped over her left shoulder. Her dress is an* aikapur *called* mense marthra

*Below:*
*Map of Bhutan*



Ltd.; 1986), selected supplementary-weft pattern motifs are cataloged in black and white graph form, with diagrams showing how these designs are combined in one type of women's dress: the *kushuthara*.

Bhutan's cultural, political, and religious background has important implications for the study of indigenous textiles. Although firm conclusions cannot be drawn at this point, this paper proposes a framework for better understanding local weaving traditions based on social and political history. Circumstantial evidence indicates that Bhutan has been populated since before 1000 B.C. by agricultural peoples, but even Bhutanese legend is silent on the origins of these early inhabitants.[3] The critical event recalled in popular tradition is the introduction of Tibetan Buddhism to the region in the eighth century by the well-known saint, Padmasambhava (Guru Rimpoche). Shortly afterwards, in the ninth century, Tibetan settlers began arriving in Bhutan's lush hills in a series of migrations described by twelfth-century Tibetan texts and later Bhutanese annals. It was in the early 1600s that the region's assorted peoples were united by a remarkable statesman and religious leader from Tibet, Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal. Shabdrung established not only Bhutan's political boundaries, but also a system of secular and religious rule, which endured until the present royal lineage was installed in the early-twentieth century. The country still embraces the Drukpa Kargyu school of Tibetan Buddhism as its official religion.

Geographically, Bhutan may be described as a series of narrow, north-south valleys separated by rugged mountains; although lateral communication and trade did take place, the "subcultures" of eastern, central, and western Bhutan—as well as smaller populations in between these three major regions—have remained distinct. Relative geographic isolation has, thus, helped to preserve various languages and dialects of the country's early settlers, and the regional character of Bhutanese textiles. Although many textiles now have a "national" identity and share designs inspired by Tibetan Buddhism, the national religion since the 1600s, their format and patterns are often associated with particular geographic areas or ethnic groups. Scholarly documentation of regional designs, and of the weaving and dyeing techniques utilized in textiles illustrated in the above books, remains to be done. Studies in southern, northern, and far eastern Bhutan would be useful, too, because very different textiles are encountered there. Nomadic herders in northern and eastern Bhutan, for example, wear particular costumes which deserve attention but are only referred to in passing here. Features of some handloomed fabrics, particularly those patterned with supplementary-warp yarns, clearly indicate that Bhutan is a meeting point of technical and decorative traditions from both the Tibetan culture area and regions to the southeast, a link yet to be thoroughly explored.[4]

Like the textiles themselves, weaving terms and names of textiles, designs, and dyestuffs vary as one crosses Bhutan. Even among informants who are native speakers of the same language, pronunciation may differ. Unless otherwise indicated, terms are given in Dzongkha (Dz), the language of western Bhutan written in Tibetan script. Orthography tends to differ radically from pronunciation, so italicized words are modified spellings developed with Bhutanese assistance rather than strict transliterations. Where relevant or necessary, terms are given in

*Bumthangkha (Bu)*, spoken in central Bhutan

*Kurtöpeykha (Ku)*, one of the languages of Kurtö (Lhuntshi District), an important weaving area in the northeast

*Sharchopkha (Sh)*, the major language of eastern Bhutan

*Tibetan (Tib)*

In future, linguistic clues will continue to clarify the origins of and relationships between textile format and particular designs.

This paper provides an overview of Bhutanese textiles, which are more diverse and evolutionary in nature than has previously been acknowledged. Brief introductions to *Fibers, Looms, and Weaving Regions* and *Dyes and Dyeing* are followed by discussions of important costume and accessory textiles used in Bhutan. Changes in function and fashion, some of which relate to the social and political history of the country, are considered wherever possible. Technical characteristics of textiles also are

given. The following text contains structural descriptions differentiating more precisely between types of supplementary-weft patterning used by the Bhutanese that to date have generally been termed "brocade."[5] As noted, completely distinct textiles exist in certain high-altitude areas and are not covered here; the role of cloth in ceremonial gift-giving and, formerly, in tax payments will likewise be considered in another essay. The comments made in this paper are preliminary observations offered as a framework for future studies. They invite refinement and are intended to encourage greater appreciation of Bhutan's textile heritage, past and present.

## *Fibers, Looms and Weaving Regions*

*Never wear a raw-silk dress*
*or anything dyed with lac.*

In taking a closer look at Bhutanese textiles, we might begin with the adage above, which reflects the belief of Bhutanese Buddhists that all life is sacred, even that of silkworms and the insects that secrete lac, still widely thought to be the insects' blood. This pious saying does not reflect practice, however, for raw-silk fabric and lac's characteristic deep red color are ubiquitous. Bartholomew explains the extensive use of raw silk (*bura*, bug cotton) by suggesting that the fiber is made from cocoons abandoned by silkworms, the implication being that Bhutanese produce it without violating the tenets of Buddhism. It is true that some raw silk, produced by a silkworm *(Philosoma cynthia)* that feeds on several native trees, is cultivated in Bhutan. However, most cocoons that are spun locally and much raw-silk yarn comes from neighboring Assam in India. This is because cocoons must be boiled prior to spinning, and Bhutanese generally refrain from activities that may involve the taking of life, even accidently. The small quantities of raw silk manufactured in Kheng, Tashigang, and other parts of eastern Bhutan are produced mainly by families who cannot afford imported yard goods, yarns, or cocoons.[6] Extruded silk *(seshu)*, spun by the true silkworm *(Bombyx mori)* that feeds on mulberry trees, has always been obtained from China or India.

As for the popular dye from eastern Bhutan, stick lac is not blood, but a resinous substance deposited on certain trees and shrubs by the lac insect *(Laccifer lacca)*. Some of these tiny creatures are unavoidably killed in the process of harvesting the dye; consequently, many Bhutanese feel they would shame themselves by taking part in lac production. The dyestuff was in great demand, however, to color monk's robes, for example, so the promise of a market overrode conscience in some villages and ensured a supply historically used throughout the country and in adjacent regions. Lac is further discussed under *Dyes and Dyeing* (below).

To supplement indigenous fibers, the Bhutanese use imported materials. Some of these like Assamese raw silk have been used for centuries, and are still appreciated today. Bright Indian threads, fine silk from Varanasi, and metallic yarns enjoy wide popularity. Commercial cotton yarns have long been available and are now replacing cotton once cultivated in southeastern Bhutan. Local production continues, but has diminished greatly over the past twenty-five years with the decline of tenant farming and the plentiful supply of Indian machine-spun varieties. In central Bhutan, the supply of sheep wool formerly supplemented by fleece obtained through trade with Tibet has recently been augmented by raw merino wool from Australia.[7]

Almost all weaving in Bhutan is done either on fixed-frame backstrap looms *(thagshing)* or on horizontal-frame looms *(thrithag)*, both of which utilize a continuous warp (Figs. 1 and 2). Both looms are

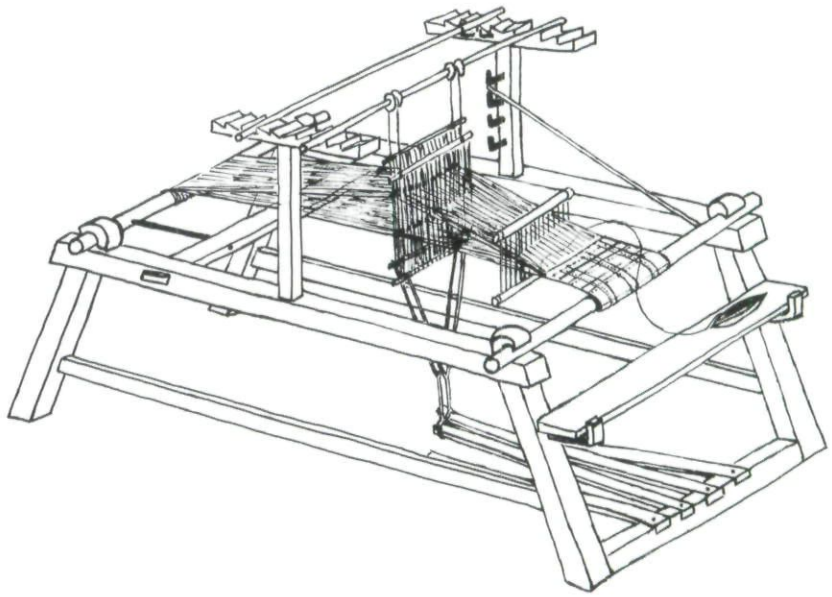
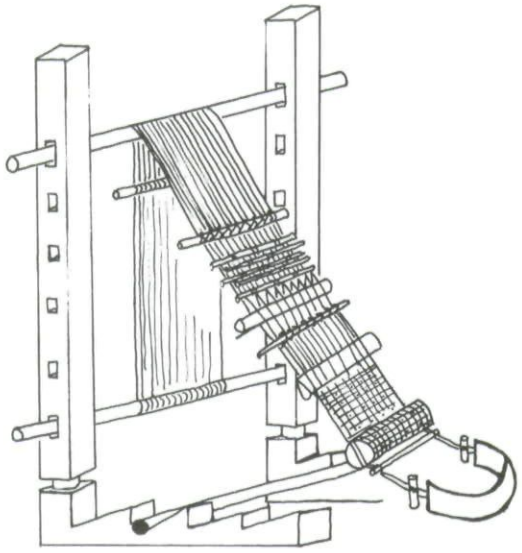


*Fig. 1*
*Fixed-frame loom* (thrithag)

*Fig. 2*
*Backstrap loom* (thagshing)



encountered in adjacent countries: the former in northeastern India, northern Burma, and southern Yunnan, and the latter in parts of Nepal and southern Tibet, from where it was introduced to Bhutan earlier in this century.[8] Fabric woven on these looms is limited in width to roughly two feet, so utilitarian textiles are fashioned by stitching together two or more lengths of cloth. A woman's garment, for example, if made of silk or cotton, consists of three panels joined in the warp direction and oriented horizontally in the finished dress. If made of narrower, woolen fabric woven on a horizontal loom, the garment may have up to fourteen panels, which are oriented vertically when the dress is worn. A seat cover is two panels of heavy, woolen fabric sewn together in the warp direction, while a rain cloak comprises three panels. A third technique, card weaving, was used traditionally for making men's narrow belts and is popular today for making a contemporary style of woman's belt as well.[9]

The association of textiles with specific regions is still strong in Bhutan. The four high-altitude valleys of Bumthang (see map) produce striped, woolen plain weaves; fine, plaid twills; and heavy, supplementary-weft-patterned twills *(yathra)*. Moving east, the Kurtö (Lhuntshi District) area is famed for women's dresses called *kushuthara*, *kushu* referring to regional styles of supplementary-weft patterning on a white field and *thara* being a local word for women's dress. The Tashigang region on Bhutan's eastern border, populated mainly by Sharchop people, is renowned for striped, plaid, and supplementary-warp-patterned raw-silk textiles. Nothing has been published on the weaving of Merak Sakteng, the highest settled area of Tashigang, which is home to a non-Sharchop mountain people[10], or on the looms of herding communities across northern Bhutan. Mongar and Pemagatsel Districts, south of Tashigang, produce a variety of distinctive cottons. Eastern Bhutan is also known for coarse sacking made from the bark of a nettle plant *(Girardinia palmata)*, which was once widely used for men's robes.[11] Weaving can now be observed in Thimphu and nearby areas, but, historically, western Bhutan does not have a handloom tradition, and central and eastern districts are the sources of most fabrics.[12]

In an effort to develop weaving from a household activity into a cottage industry whose products are marketable domestically and abroad, the royal government has sanctioned activities to stimulate the craft. The National Women's Association of Bhutan (NWAB), under the patronage of Her Royal Highness Ashi Sonam Chhoden Wangchuck, has distributed yarn on credit and opened a weaving training center in Pemagatsel whose products are marketed through the NWAB office in Thimphu. The Swedish-assisted Handloom Development Project in Khaling (Tashigang) is exploring cost-efficient vegetable dyeing and sustainable production of high-quality fabrics for the domestic, as well as the export market. Finally, part of a recent loan from the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) is intended for providing credit to weavers and establishing yarn centers and a dyeing plant in the Tashigang-Mongar area.

A visitor to Bhutan is struck immediately by the Bhutanese love of color, in architecture, in traditional furnishings, and in textiles. Some of the most popular costumes are striped raw silks, appropriately described as "having a rainbow" *(jadrima)*. Traditional woolen garments show colorful weft striping or bold plaid patterns on a warm rust or cool plum ground. Current

tastes in Thimphu and elsewhere also embrace bright fibers and fabrics from abroad. Women's dresses patterned with vivid pink, orange, purple, and blue yarns are in vogue for fancy occasions, while synthetic wool plaids and striped polyesters from Tokyo and New York are everyday wear on the streets of the capital. Local shops carry gaily patterned silk brocades from Hong Kong, shot with silver and gold, for women's jackets.

Bhutanese men have a similar flair for style. The well-to-do have always favored robes of imported brocade for special occasions, as was the fashion in Tibet. Throughout Bhutan, however, ordinary robes are usually designed, if not woven, by wives for their husbands, who are themselves connoisseurs of color and design. Traditional stripes and plaids are favorites, although imported gray flannels and even pin-striped woolens are slowly appearing! Colors are selected and then yarns are dyed by household retainers or neighborhood women who specialize in dyeing; the weaving may be similarly contracted. Formerly, however, most women learned to spin, dye, and weave by helping their mothers produce the textiles that clothed the family, covered mattresses and cushions, and outfitted packhorses. Because more girls are being educated, many women who are now young mothers in Thimphu did not learn to weave, and their infant daughters will not grow up in homes where looms are busy.[13]

## *Dyes and Dyeing*

Change is coming most slowly in rural areas, where the art of dyeing, like weaving, is still widely practiced. Villagers use a standard selection of dyeplants found throughout Bhutan as well as local variants. Many of these traditional dyestuffs occur in other Himalayan regions, and specific procedures for extracting color closely resemble those popular in Ladakh, Nepal, Sikkim, and southern Tibet. Nowadays, even in rural areas, natural dyestuffs often serve as overdyes to enhance the color of commercial yarns. Synthetic dyes are also widely used on yarns spun at home, simply because they are easily available, inexpensive, and labor-efficient. Bhutanese are fond of the vibrant colors that result, but at the same time consider synthetic tints inferior to hues achieved with natural dyes.

Historically, Bhutan was noted in this region as a source of two dyes: lac *(jatsho)* from the warm eastern valleys, and madder *(tso* or *tsut; Rubia manjitha* and *R. wallichiana)* which grows wild throughout the hills. Both were important export items in trade with Tibet, Nepal, and India.[14] Lac is still a sought-after dye for reds, although production has dropped with the availability of synthetic substitutes that are easier to use and with the closing of the borders with Tibet. Extracting color from stick lac is a slow process, beginning with repeated gradual heating until a white residue rises to the surface. Ground yeast and grain are then stirred into the bath, and the wool is soaked for up to a week in the covered pot. As the red color emerges, the dyebath is boiled and various ingredients are added to produce darker shades. Four distinct hues are obtained—from pink to rich, deep red—with true maroon and plum tints achieved by plunging yarns briefly into a solution of indigo. Wild madder is sometimes used for reds, but is more commonly combined with turmeric to create orange.

The only blue dye comes from broad-leafed shrubs containing indigotin; these shrubs are known as *rum* (indigo; *Strobilanthes* sp.).[15] As in other Himalayan areas, indigo dyeing in Bhutan is a long, labor-intensive process that is easily spoiled, hence the superstitions that pregnant women should not be involved (lest the color be "stolen" by the baby) and that strangers should not witness the activity (lest they take away the color). Only after the plant leaves are dried, ground, and then fermented in an alkaline solution of hardwood ashes is the yarn immersed. The first dyelot is a light blue, with two to four successive steepings yielding deeper shades.

At least three varieties of *Symplocos* trees contain a yellow pigment in their leaves: *zhungkhe, zim,* and *pangtsi,* whose berries are popularly pressed for oil.[16] Berries from certain thorn bushes *(kipitsang)* are an alternate source of yellow. Turmeric and coarsely ground buckwheat grains are added to yellow dyebaths to heighten color, while madder leaves and twigs are stirred in to produce orange and rust. Greens are achieved by steeping yarns that have been tinted blue with indigo in a second solution made of *Symplocos* leaves.



*Fig. 3*
Kera. *Detail showing intermittent bands of patterning (top) on the end of the textile worn next to the body. This patterning is concealed when the* kera *is wrapped and tucked in place*

Numerous other local plants are exploited to supplement the weaver's palette. In north central Bhutan, white wool is colored brown with walnut husks and a bit of madder. Frequently mentioned as a source of black is a mud mixed with a poisonous root (Bu: *chukchume*) that causes swelling to the face and hands. Light purple is obtained from pinecones gathered in areas over ten thousand feet. Various alums *(dochur)* and a substance known locally as "stone indigo" *(dorum)* are traditional mordants.[17] Sour fruits like *khomachurpo* and *tungchurpo*, native to temperate regions of central and eastern Bhutan, also serve as mordants, as does pomegranate skin in western Bhutan.

### *Types of Textiles and Their Technical Characteristics*

Descriptions of important costume and accessory textiles follow in three sections:

*Women's Costume*
- *Kera* (belt)
- *Wonju and Tögo* (blouse and jacket)
- *Kira* (dress)
- *Kushung* (regional ceremonial dress)
- *Shingkha* (regional ceremonial dress)
- *Rachung* (ceremonial shoulder sash and carrying cloth

*Men's Costume*
- *Kera* (belt)
- *Tögo* (shirt)
- *Go* (robe)
- *Kamne* (ceremonial shoulder sash)

*Selected Accessory Textiles*
- *Chaksi pangkheb* (ceremonial textile)
- *Pangkheb* (multipurpose textile)
- *Phechung* (carrying bag)
- *Bündi* (carrying cloth)
- *Yathra* (multipurpose textile)
- *Charkab* (rain cloak)
- *Denkheb* (mattress cover)

Technical characteristics described in the text are those most commonly encountered in a given type of textile, but exceptions occur in each body of examples. The textile names generally correspond to those used by Adams and Bartholomew, although some spellings have been changed on the advice of Bhutanese consultants.

### *Women's Costume*

*Kera* (waist cloth) (Fig.3)
Woman's cummerbund, or belt

*a.Ground*: traditionally cotton or raw silk (once also nettle fiber?)

*Pattern:* raw silk, silk, or cotton

Two-faced and double-faced patterning with continuous supplementary wefts, on a slightly warp-faced plain-weave foundation

*b. Ground:* cotton or silk

*Pattern*: cotton, silk, acrylic, and metallic yarns

Single-faced patterning with continuous and discontinuous supplementary wefts, and single-faced patterning with discontinuous supplementary wefts that are twined and wrapped (Ku: tima), on one face of a card-woven ground. The foundation is usually a countered 4-strand warp-twined fabric, showing triple wefts and twining that is inverted at intervals throughout the textile

The traditional *kera* (Fig. 3) is a generous length of cotton or raw silk embellished with horizontal bands of supplementary-weft patterning. Measuring twelve to eighteen inches wide and six to eight feet long, the kera is folded over in the warp direction several times and secured around the waist by tucking in the long warp fringe at one end. Pairs of these cummerbunds, made on backstrap looms, are sometimes woven as a single textile with elaborate patterning on the outer ends and intermittent embellishment in the center. After weaving, this textile is cut across the weft in the middle and becomes two kera. Each has one unfinished end that may be turned under and hemmed, and one decorated, fringed end that is seen when worn.

The selvage-to-selvage two-faced patterning of traditional kera is highly formalistic. It consists of a sequence of single-color, geometric pattern bands (Sh: *thangshing*), typically executed in red alternating with blue or black on an unbleached white ground. The sequence is interrupted regularly by a two-color band (Sh: *thok*) displaying repeating diamonds. In some examples, floral pattern bands (Sh: *komtsham*) also occur. In between the bands of figurative patterning are very narrow weft-wise "stripes" (Sh: *tsimpiring*), formed by supplementary-weft floats that create a nearly identical pattern on both sides of the fabric. A number of traditional cummerbunds show multicolored designs on a white or yellow ground, but patterns always adhere to the general format described.

Older women, particularly those living in rural areas, still weave old-style cummerbunds, but women preferring a slimmer look now use an altogether different type of belt. Made by card weaving, contemporary kera (b.) are only about 3 inches wide and have shorter fringes for tucking in. Usually of cotton or silk, these belts are embellished with colorful yarns of various fibers. Both patterning techniques and designs are adapted from those in *kushuthara*, a much-admired type of women's dress (discussed below under *kira*). Contemporary belts often are sparsely decorated in the center, but each fringed end has patterns so that either end can be worn outermost. These kera, thus, are "reversible" in a way that traditional cummerbunds with only one fringed, patterned end are not.

*Wonju* (Tib: *wangchuk*) (Fig.4, see page 24)
Woman's blouse

Imported silk, cotton, polyester, and other fabrics

*Tögo* (upper garment)
Woman's jacket

a. Raw silk or cotton; plain weave

b. Wool; plain or weft-striped twill weave

c. Imported cotton, polyester, silk brocade and other fabrics

Bhutanese women wear their dresses over a Tibetan-style *wonju*, a loose, long-sleeved blouse of silk or another lightweight fabric (Fig. 4). Once the dress is arranged, a woman's outfit is completed with a short, wide-sleeved jacket *(tögo)*. The jacket sleeves are folded back, with the blouse sleeves, into three-inch cuffs worn at three-quarter length. Everyday jackets are a solid, often dark color and made of various fabrics; bright, patterned silk brocade is worn on fancy occasions. The colors of blouses and jackets are chosen so that a brighter or lighter blouse contrasts dramatically with the jacket. Presently, both garments tend to be of imported, rather than handloomed textiles.

Photographs from early decades of this century show a different combination of upper garments, indicating a relatively recent change in style.[18] The distinctive cuffs are evident, but are somewhat deeper than fashionable now and worn at wrist level. More importantly, the cuffs are formed by the sleeves of an inner jacket; the women are not wearing a blouse at all. The inner jackets are white and were reportedly made of handwoven cotton or raw silk. The ordinary outer jackets shown are plain, dark

cotton or wool, or velvet, which is no longer in vogue. Patterned silk brocades were worn by the well-to-do or saved for special occasions as they are today. White raw-silk jackets were also popular as outerwear at one time, although they are not seen in the photographs examined. Now they are said to be old-fashioned, but are admired as extremely traditional.

The custom of wearing a Tibetan-style blouse was probably adopted by the Bhutanese aristocracy in the course of their contacts with the Tibetan nobility, and then gradually replaced the earlier style among the general population. Interestingly, the women of Merak Sakteng in eastern Bhutan today wear a regional, blouse-less costume that includes inner and outer jackets. The outer garment is completely different from the tögo worn in other parts of Bhutan: it is hip-length and always shows a traditional pattern of animal figures on a red ground. Notably, the handloomed inner jacket is of white raw silk or cotton.[19] The possible significance of similarities between costumes of this remote area and styles that are now obsolete elsewhere in the country is explored under *shingkha*.

*Kira* (a cloth that wraps around) (Fig.5)
Woman's dress

*a. Ground*: cotton, raw silk, or silk (once also nettle fiber?); now may be rayon or another synthetic fiber

*Pattern:* raw silk, silk and/or cotton; now also synthetic and metallic yarns

(1) Warp-faced plain weave (e.g., *thara*)

(2) Warp-faced plain weave with single-faced supplementary-weft patterning using discontinuous and continuous yarns, which are sometimes twined and wrapped (*tima*) (e.g., *pesar, kushuthara*)

(3) Warp-faced plain weave patterned with supplementary-warp yarns that float on one face when not floating on the other face (*aikapur*)

(4) Warp-faced plain weave with both supplementary-warp patterning and single-faced patterning using discontinuous supplementary wefts (e.g., certain *aikapur* and *kushuthara*)

*b. Ground:* wool

Plain or twill weave (e.g., *thare, hothra, jalu, marthra, serthra*)

Imported silk, cotton, polyester, and other fabrics



*Fig. 5*
*The type of kira known as* kushuthara. *Oriented as it would be when worn, the textile has striped panels at the upper and lower edges and intricate supplementary-warp patterning at either end*

Rectangular in shape, the *kira* is wrapped around the body, folded into a wide pleat in front, then fastened at the shoulders with ornate silver and gold brooches (Fig. 5). Belted tightly, the garment is bloused about the waist to form a pouch where money, keys, and other necessities are carried. Customarily worn at a practical level above the ankles, kira are worn longer nowadays in urban circles—and should certainly cover the wearer's high heels! The dress consists of three panels *(bjang)* joined in the warp direction and oriented horizontally if made of silk, raw silk, or cotton. When made of narrower woolens woven on a horizontal loom, the dress may have up to fourteen panels joined in the warp direction and oriented vertically in the finished garment.

All classes of Bhutanese women wear the same type of apparel, although the quality of weaving and degree of patterning naturally vary. It was formerly common for women, and men, to wear more than one garment at a time, regardless of the season. This custom has apparently been retained in rural areas, for villagers sometimes still dress in this manner.[20] The doubling of garments reportedly demonstrated that the wearer was a person of some means who owned more than one outfit. Layered clothing helped provide warmth in winter and was practical for another reason: a plain, easily washable outer garment served to keep the more elaborate inner garment clean.

There are many types of kira; the name of each type refers to the design of the fabric the dress is made of. Since patterns and fibers are generally associated with certain regions, these names formerly indicated the fabric's place of origin, or at least, the weaver's home; to some extent this is still true. Indigenous to Bumthang and parts of Tongsa in central Bhutan are simple dresses named *thare* (Bu: woven cloth). Plain or twill weaves produced on backstrap looms, thare are usually made of brown or black sheep wool. A related kira with broad bands of blue, maroon, and brown is called *tari chem* (having tiger stripes). Another important type of woolen dress associated with central Bhutan is *hothra* (literally, Mongolian design), woven on a horizontal frame loom and decorated with narrow weft stripes.



*Fig. 6*
*Woman wearing a* kira *made of fabric called* hothra jalu

Hothra and a variant pattern showing weft stripes alternating with horizontal rows of crosses on a plain ground (*jalu*; Tib: *thigthra*) (Fig. 6) were manufactured traditionally in Tibet and obtained through trade before the introduction of horizontal looms to Bhutan.[21] Plaid woolens from Bumthang are discussed under men's costume, but are also used for kira.

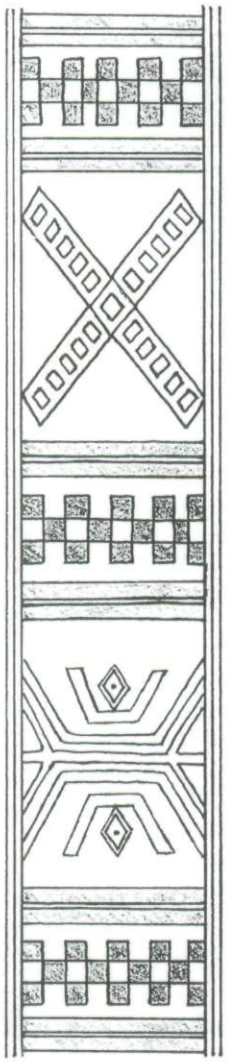
Assorted striped and plaid costume textiles are woven in Pemagatsel, Tashigang, Mongar, and Shemgang Districts in the southeast. Inhabitants of these well-known weaving areas formerly paid taxes with cotton cloth they produced, notably certain plain and simply decorated textiles that are not much seen now.[22] Wearable fabrics, some of which are woven even now of hand-spun cotton dyed at home, continue to be readily available. *Shardang thara* (Sh: striped woman's dress) is a typical local pattern showing multicolored warp stripes arranged on a white field.

Among the most distinctive kira are those made from the splendid supplementary-warp-patterned fabrics collectively known as *aikapur*.[23] Woven primarily in eastern Bhutan, but once also made in Bumthang by weavers in noble households, these textiles are cotton, raw silk or silk,

*Right:*
*Fig. 7*
Jadrima, *an* aikapur *pattern showing yellow and white supplementary-warp pattern bands between colorful warp striping. Finished fringe appears at the lower edge of the photograph*



*Below:*
*Fig. 8*
*Detail of supplementary-warp patterning in* aikapur, *showing a* trangka *(coin) motif on the top and* gimtsi *(scissors) on the bottom. "Five-footed" crossbars separate the motifs*



often in combination. Aikapur features alternating bands of plain weave (Sh: *pang*) and supplementary-warp patterning (Sh: *hor*) whose format resembles certain fabrics from the northeastern frontier of India.[24] Five main color schemes are distinguished:

*lungserma* (Sh: yellow background fabric): green and red pattern bands on a yellow ground

*jadrima* (cloth well-arranged with a rainbow): yellow and white pattern bands between colorful warp striping

*mense mathra* (Bhutanese yellow and red design): yellow pattern bands on a red field

*menthag* (Bhutanese weaving): blue or black and red pattern bands between colorful warp striping

*dromchung chema* (cloth having little boxes): red, green, yellow, and white pattern bands[25]

Multicolored warp stripes in any version of the above aikapur (Fig. 7) inspire the apt secondary designation "having a rainbow" *(jadri chem,* or *jadrima* for short). During the past seventy years, small supplementary-weft patterns have appeared in the bands of plain weave in some aikapur, an innovation loosely described as *pesar* (new design).[26]

Aikapur is further differentiated by the width of its supplementary-warp pattern bands. Following the warp direction, these bands share a standard format: a primary motif; followed by a stripe in the weft direction, a hatched crossbar in the weft direction, and another stripe in the weft direction; a primary motif; and so on (Fig. 8). While primary motifs may repeat or vary within a given pattern band, the intervening crossbars are identical. They are composed of segments that the Bhutanese call "feet." There are usually three, five, seven, or nine feet in a crossbar, all auspicious numbers to Buddhists. Bhutanese describe an aikapur according to how many feet the crossbars have (the pattern shown in Fig. 8 is *kang ngapa* or five-footed). Examples with nine or more feet are highly regarded because they generally have more intricate patterns. In some twentieth-century aikapur, pattern bands alternate with parallel bands of single-faced supplementary-weft patterning showing floral *(shinglo)* motifs.

The most famous type of kira is the *kushuthara* (Ku: brocaded woven cloth) (Fig. 5). Identified by a white ground exuberantly patterned with intricate designs, kushuthara come from northeastern Bhutan's Kurtö (Lhuntshi) District, an area known for the particular style of discontinuous supplementary-weft patterning (Ku: *kushu;* loosely, brocade) that characterizes these dresses. An extensive number of designs is used, as can be seen from those inventoried by David Barker. Their evocative names—"crow's beak," "monkey's nail," "charm box," "sacred thunderbolt," "cooking pot lip," and others—suggest a rich, complex imagery whose meaning in popular symbology remains to be better explored and understood.

Field designs on kushuthara are executed in what Kurtep weavers term *sapma* (Ku), a technique where multiple continuous and discontinuous supplementary wefts are floated in variable spans on the face of the plain weave; and *tima* (Ku), where two pairs of pattern wefts are interworked with warp elements and each other so they appear to be riding on the surface of the ground. Tima pattern wefts typically are crisscrossed with each other in a vertical "shoelace" pattern, or wrapped around warps in the manner of countered weft-wrapping so the result resembles a hori-

zontal chain stitch. Neither sampa nor tima pattern wefts can be seen on the reverse side of the warp-faced textile.

Like many kira, kushuthara consist of three panels joined in the warp direction and oriented horizontally. The outer panels show bold warp stripes that appear at the upper and lower edges of the garment when worn. Elaborate selvage-to-selvage single-faced patterning decorates both fringed ends of the kushuthara, although only one end is seen after the dress is wrapped around the wearer; the dress can be worn with either end outermost. As in other kira, the fringe is finished by twisting several warp ends together, tightly plying three of these composite yarns, and then cutting each yarn to half an inch. Variants of the kushuthara are *ngoshem* (dresses with a blue field), *jangshem* (green field), *napshem* (black field), and *mapshem* (red field)[27]; these terms also apply to other styles of kira. Today, garments with blue fields are very much in fashion, and those with green fields, although few, are greatly admired.

The development of kushuthara design and the popularization of this type of kira throughout Bhutan is partly due to the nobility of Kurtö District, who commonly retained weavers among their household staff. The family of Bhutan's first king, Sir Ugyen Wangchuck (r. 1907-1926), was originally from this area, although recent generations have lived in Bumthang. Many of the Kurtö *ashi* (princesses) who were part of or married into the royal family brought their servants, including weavers, to Bumthang. Just forty years ago, the staff at one local palace there included seven full-time dyers and forty weavers, as well as twenty people who did nothing but spin and then wind skeins and balls of yarn. In a courtyard at one residence, Lamey Gyömpa, there was a large mortar stone for preparing dyes, which were ground with a wooden lever turned by a waterwheel. The British emissary John Claude White photographed a group of these court weavers, probably at Lamey Gyömpa, in 1906.[28] As Bartholomew points out, these women were free from the pressures of commercial production and wove some of the most exquisite surviving kushuthara. Their work is known as *hingtham*, "heart-woven," as opposed to *tsongtham*, or "woven for sale."



*Fig. 9*
Kushung
*(Photo: R. Chavda)*

The kushu patterning of Kurtö District reached its peak under noble patronage, which probably also encouraged the development of the kushuthara as a dress format—offering as it does a larger area of fabric to embellish than the related Kurtö costume called *kushung* (below).

*Kushung* or *kushu atsa* (Ku: brocaded dress or petticoat) (Fig.9)
Woman's regional ceremonial garment; possibly ordinary dress in earlier times

*Ground:* cotton or nettle fiber

*Pattern:* raw silk, wool and nettle fiber

Single-faced supplementary-weft patterning using continuous and discontinuous yarns that are sometimes twined and

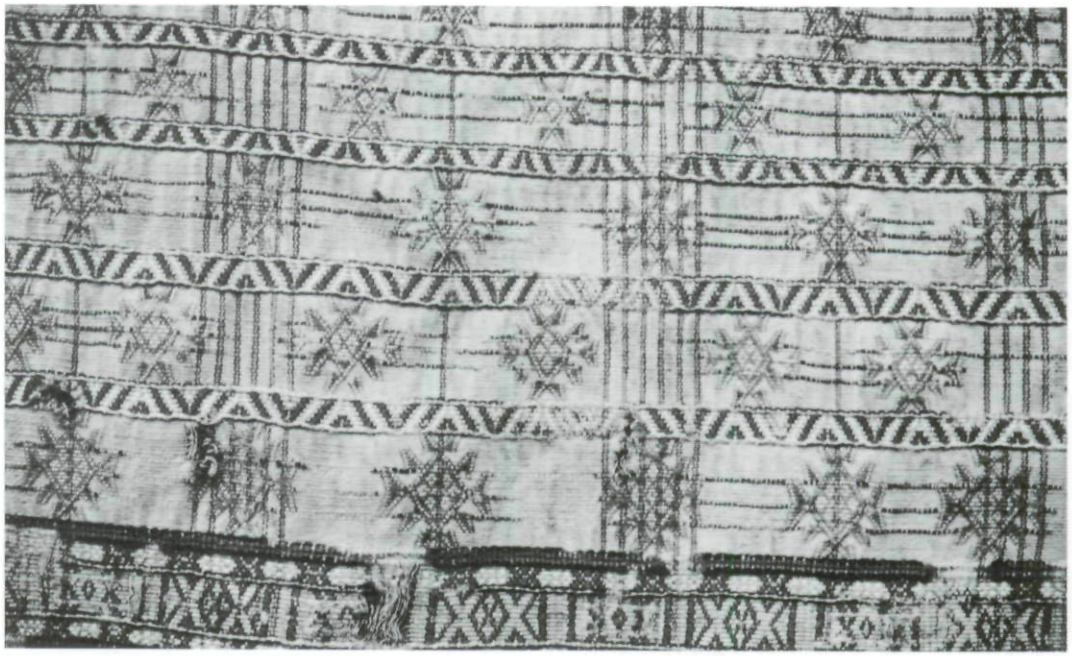


*Fig. 10*
Kushung. *Detail showing raised woolen patterning* (tima) *along hem of garment (Photo: R. Chavda)*

wrapped *(tima)*, on a warp-faced plain-weave foundation; localized patterning with multiple supplementary wefts of wool and nettle fiber

Appliqué of various textiles at the neck opening in some examples

A poncho or tunic-style costume, the *kushung* is comprised of two panels of unbleached cotton or nettle cloth joined in the warp direction and oriented vertically in the finished garment. A hole for the neck is left in the center seam. The joined panels are folded over at the shoulder line before being stitched together along the outer selvages, leaving spacious armholes. Kushung are embellished with sapma and tima (Fig. 10), the supplementary-weft patterning techniques found on kushuthara (above). Designs in the textile field are taken from the same inventory, but add occasional human and animal figures. Patterns are arranged so they spill down the front and back of the garment from an axis of symmetry that is usually along the shoulders. Very narrow colored warp stripes occur at intervals in the field; during weaving, these help the weaver to position individual designs. The neck opening may be plain or ornamented with woolen appliqué, patchworked and quilted ribbons, and tassels. The style of neck finishing was a matter of preference and skill, and, reportedly, identified the family of the weaver in some cases.

A long warp fringe is retained along the poncho's lower edge, which is bordered with eighteen or more inches of selvage-to-selvage supplementary-weft patterning (Fig. 10). This border includes unusual, raised pattern bands (Ku: *taksing tima, khodang*). In most examples studied, the bands are formed by multiple, variable-sized supplementary yarns of dyed wool or plain (undyed) nettle fiber. The raised effect is achieved when several of these yarns, which are slightly thicker than the ground wefts, are used in a given shed. Patterns are created by passing varicolored supplementary wefts over and under warp yarns at staggered intervals; individual pattern wefts within a single shed often show these differing float spans. This type of patterning is not found in any other known Bhutanese textile.[29]

Today, the kushung is a ceremonial costume worn mainly in Kurtö District. Most, if not all, kushung were made there in villages still famed for weaving kushuthara. It is said the garments were once everyday dress in this area; in certain villages, older natives recall ponchos being worn occasionally in their grandparents' time. The similarity between the terms kushung and kushu, the name of the pat-

terning seen on these costumes and other local textiles, suggests a significant, early identification between the two. Outside Kurtö, some eastern Bhutanese know the poncho as a kushung, and in Bumthang, a descriptive name often heard is *ganmo atsa*, or old woman's dress. Farther away from Kurtö, Bhutanese do not recognize the style and cannot name it.[30]

Clues to the origins and earlier functions of the kushung may emerge from eventual study of its present use in ritual. In Kurtö, the garment is worn by women during an annual festival unique to a handful of villages (described below under *shingkha*). The ceremonies involve appeasement of a "Bön god" associated with a local religion which was suppressed with the seventeenth-century advent of Buddhism. In neighboring Bumthang, a kushung is stored in some temples for use in another festival, where the poncho is worn by a male dancer. Sporting a black wooden mask depicting a fierce, woman's face, the dancer portrays an archetypal female "joker" who teases the crowd.[31] In other Bumthang villages, kushung formerly were worn by two women in each household for certain annual rituals. The conservatism of Vajrayana Buddhism and indigenous animism may help explain the survival of the kushung in religious dances and ceremonies in Bhutan—and would support the thesis that tunic-style dress was once more prevalent than at present.[32]

If the kushung was an early costume in Kurtö, nineteenth-century—or earlier—patronage of weaving possibly provided a stimulus for modifying kushung patterning into kushuthara design. The garments' relationship is obvious in the overall arrangement of patterns within each costume's format. The intricately worked end borders of a kushuthara, for example, preserve the traditional hem patterns of a kushung; now they are along the sides rather than the lower edge of the garment, but they are still distinct from the patterning of the field. The nobility's fondness for excellence in weaving certainly encouraged the increased detail in some late kushung patterns (Adams 1984, pl. 104), and the local aristocracy no doubt welcomed an expansion of the fabric area treated in this manner: the fully patterned kushuthara. Even now, upper-class tastes favor densely embellished textiles, which demonstrate their weavers' skill in executing intricate designs.

This is not to say that the Kurtö nobility devised the wraparound-style dress (kira), of which kushuthara are but one example. In most of eastern Bhutan, kira are known as *thara* (Sh). Many locally woven thara show broad bands of warp striping at the upper and lower edges of the garment and narrower warp stripes across the field; they exhibit, in other words, the colorful ground weave of kushuthara, but lack the typical supplementary-weft patterns. Inhabitants of Kurtö surely encountered thara through contact with nearby areas and perhaps adopted the wraparound-style dress alongside their own ponchos. A whole group of kushuthara show warp-striped fields with supplementary-weft patterning only at the fringed ends; other dresses, even relatively recent ones, have sparse field designs. These examples suggest a gradual transformation of thara through application of the patterning (kushu) used on indigenous ponchos and other weavings. More and more elaborate embellishment of these dresses, until they became a distinctive regional style covered with exquisite patterning, was a process surely fostered by noble patronage of weaving.

Just when and in what stages this interplay of kushung and thara evolved into the kushuthara may be better understood someday through studies of the political and social history of eastern Bhutan. The kushung's present use in a local non-Buddhist festival suggests that what was formerly an everyday garment may have been relegated to limited ritual use as a result of the region's religious conversion and political incorporation into the emergent Buddhist nation of Bhutan, a process that began under Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal in the seventeenth century. Even now, this festival's survival is acknowledged with some reluctance; many Bhutanese also regard the use of human and animal figures on wearing apparel like the kushung as vaguely "inappropriate" and associate poncho-style costumes with "primitive" people.[33] Recent political events do help explain why the kushung remains a little-known regional garment, while the



*Fig. 11*
Shingkha. *Village women demonstrating how the garment was worn with the appliqué panels at the sides folded toward the front*

*Shingkha* (Ku) (Fig. 11)
Woman's regional ceremonial dress
Wool; twill weave
Appliqué of various textiles at neck and side seams

Like the *kushung*, the poncho known as the *shingkha* is a ceremonial dress associated with certain villages in Kurtö District. Examples also survive in neighboring Bumthang, where the garment is usually described rather fancifully as an angel's dress (Bu: *kandomey atsa*), rather than called by its original name. Outside these areas, the dress is completely unfamiliar to most Bhutanese; some even suggest it is not indigenous.

The shingkha differs from the kushung in many ways. Woolen, rather than cotton or nettle cloth, the shingkha always features appliqué and ribbonwork around the neck opening whereas this trim is optional on kushung. Furthermore, it has elaborate inserts at each side seam that taper to a point under the armholes. Many colorful ribbons are attached as short tassels in these panels, which display bold appliqué showing diamonds, squares, triangles, and occasionally animals and other figures. Pieced together of patterned satin silks, broadcloth, and other trade goods from China and India, the representational motifs are occasionally seen on kushung, but not in contemporary Bhutanese dress. Furthermore, the only current Bhutanese use of appliqué is, significantly, on ceremonial accessory textiles. These include tents, but more typically seat covers and canopies for use by His Majesty and high lamas (priests). The appliqué on these textiles, however, shows animal and other symbols derived from Tibetan Buddhist iconography and is very different from the appliqué on shingkha.[34]

In Kurtö today, shingkha are donned by women once a year for an unusual four-day festival celebrated in only a half dozen villages. The ceremonies are meant to appease a powerful deity from pre-Buddhist days, known simply as the Bön god. The rites are mainly dances, but include making offerings of a bird and a fish—anathema, of course, to Buddhist lamas, who traditionally do not attend. The origin of the festival is explained as follows: When Padmasambhava, the saint who introduced kushuthara is popular throughout Bhutan. Prior to the establishment of the present monarchy (1907), the influence of Kurtö nobility extended mainly to neighboring regions. When the local aristocracy gained new national status around the turn of the century, the kushuthara was already well established as the regional fashion being elaborated by retained weavers. Hence the costume's subsequent elevation to a "national" style of kira.

Buddhism to Bhutan in the eighth century, was constructing Samye Monastery in Tibet, his work was plagued by a spirit who repeatedly tore down at night what had been built by day. To distract and appeal to this demon-god, Padmasambhava performed dances in the pre-Buddhist tradition, a tactic by which he succeeded in winning over the demon to assist in building the monastery. In return for this cooperation, Padmasambhava promised the deity that Buddhist believers would regularly perform those dances, which survive to this day in some parts of Kurtö. Villagers there believe that hailstorms and other catastrophes will result if the rites are not performed.

Women dress during the first two days of the festival in shingkha, knowing that rich red and dark blue are colors pleasing to the Bön god, who is believed to attend the performance. The ankle-length ponchos are arranged so their appliqué panels hang along the thighs; then the dresses are belted tightly like kira. Traditional silver headbands, said to have been used in the days before local women converted to Buddhism and began to crop their hair, are worn with the shingkha. On the last two days of the festival, lighter-colored dress—traditionally the kushung —is worn because only lesser spirits are present. Unfortunately, many *kushung* have suffered from poor storage or have reached the collectors' market of Kathmandu, so nowadays kushuthara or ordinary dresses often are worn instead.

In Bumthang, shingkha are preserved in the homes of some families who originally came from Kurtö, but are not used now. The court weavers photographed by J.C. White in Bumthang in 1906 are all wearing shingkha, which he describes as "old-fashioned dress" that his hostess and her servants donned especially for the picture.[35] The association of this dress with northern Kurtö through the nobility who migrated to Bumthang from that area is unmistakable.

Despite some clues to the regional origins of poncho-style apparel, the extent to which these ceremonial costumes may once have been everyday dress in Kurtö is unclear. The term shingkha, first of all, links northern Kurteps and the inhabitants of what is now the Tawang area of Arunachal Pradesh, India, on Bhutan's eastern border. Shingkha is usually recognized in eastern Bhutan as the name of a different, knee-length poncho worn by the women of Merak Sakteng, the high-altitude region of Tashigang lying close to the border. This costume—generally made of maroon raw silk with blue and white warp stripes, and worn belted—is shared by some communities in Tawang, where it is likewise called shingkha. Secondly, Kurtö shingkha are specifically described as either *ngaushingkha*, when made of blue woolen fabric, or *leushingkha* when of red woolen fabric. While the word *ngau* is similar to words for blue in the dominant languages of Kurtö, *leu* (red) is unique to the language spoken only in the villages that observe the above festival. Whether this term is found farther east is unknown. There is certainly a regional association between poncho-style dress and the word shingkha, however, as well as linguistic evidence indicating that the people of central Bhutan and northern Tawang have a common origin.[36] Perhaps documentary research or field study of the kushung and shingkha will illuminate these cultural links and lead to a better understanding of these very intriguing Bhutanese ponchos.

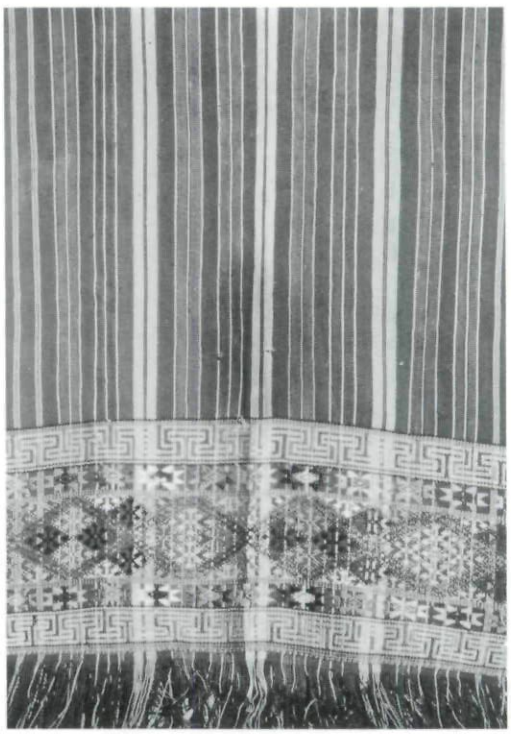


*Fig. 12*
Rachung. *Raw silk on silk. See also Figs. 4 and 12a*

*Right:*
*Fig. 12a*
*Young girl wearing a ceremonial sash* (rachung) *of the recently-developed smaller size, used only as an accessory for formal occasions*

*Far right:*
*Fig. 13*
*Dasho Sangye Rinzin, Dzongdag (Governor) of Tongsa. Dasho is wearing formal dress, which includes his red sash of rank (a variety of* kamne *called* buramap, *"red raw silk"). Ordinary citizens wear a white* kamne *(see Fig. 15). Dasho's* go *is made of* adha marthra *fabric*





*Rachung* (something small?); also known as *kamne* (covering) (Fig.12)
Woman's ceremonial shoulder sash and shawl for carrying a baby

*Ground:* raw silk or cotton

*Pattern:* raw silk, silk, or cotton; now also acrylic and metallic yarns

Two-faced patterning, using continuous and discontinuous supplementary wefts, on a warp-faced plain-weave foundation

The traditional *rachung* (often pronounced rachu) is a multipurpose textile comprised of two identical panels joined in the warp direction. Measuring about three by eight feet, the rachung is usually red and has selvage-to-selvage patterning along both fringed ends. Narrow warp stripes and scattered designs typically occur in the field. The textile serves to carry a child or bundle on a woman's—or man's—back, and doubles as a cover at night when traveling.

The rachung also has an important ceremonial function, for a Bhutanese woman must cover her left shoulder on formal occasions, in monasteries and in *dzongs*, the fortified buildings that house administrative and ecclesiastic offices. When required, the rachung is folded twice in the warp direction and once in the weft direction, and then draped over the left shoulder. Its fringed ends hang loose in front, roughly level with the wearer's waist. These ends are sometimes held in front of the mouth when speaking with high officials and lamas, the idea being that one's humble breath should not be exhaled onto a superior. In the presence of lamas, a rachung may be worn like a shawl, either folded or opened and draped forward over the arms or shoulders (Fig. 12a).

A very traditional style of rachung shows broad warp stripes in blue, yellow, and white on a red field. These examples are known as *adha rachung* because their pattern is reputed to have come from Adhang in Wangdiphodrang District. Like all rachung, adha rachung feature horizontally arranged bands of two-faced supplementary-weft patterning at each fringed end. These bands typically incorporate floral and diamond motifs, auspicious swastikas, and other designs seen on women's traditional cummerbunds and on *chaksi pangkheb* (see *Selected Accessory Textiles*, below). Tiny floral or geometric designs may be scattered in the field as well.

Today, many women prefer a smaller,

less bulky textile as their shoulder sash for formal occasions. Contemporary rachung measure only six to twelve inches wide by six feet long, a modified size developed recently just for ceremonial wear. Often very tightly woven, new rachung usually display traditional patterns, although some are worked in the more modern acrylic and metallic yarns.

### *Men's Costume* (Fig.13)

*Kera* (waist cloth)
Man's belt

Cotton, silk or wool; countered, four-strand, warp-twined fabric, showing double or triple wefts and twining that is inverted at intervals throughout the textile

Men's *kera*, measuring about two inches wide and six feet long, are made by card weaving. The warp fringe on each end is four to six inches long and finished by plying sets of yarns together. Men's kera typically show colorful warp stripes, in red, blue, white, green, brown, and yellow, for example, but are not patterned with supplementary yarns as women's kera are. Because men's robes are bloused so generously at the waist, belts are hardly visible.

*Tögo* (upper garment)
Man's shirt

Cotton (sometimes raw silk?); plain weave

Imported cotton fabric

Under their robes, men wear a loose, waist-length shirt with no fastenings. The garment is arranged so the folds of its high collar show at the neck of the robe, and its six-inch cuffs are folded back over the robe's sleeves. Like the woman's jacket, this shirt is known by the generic term tögo, although it is, of course, a different textile.

Now, men's tögo are always white, but colored shirts may have been worn in the past, at least by the upper class. A painting from the mid-1770s, for example, depicts a Bhutanese official with a white tögo under his robe and another important figure with a red tögo.[37] Old photographs, on the other hand, show many men wearing robes without tögo, as some still do in rural areas; the tögo, therefore, may have been popularized by the aristocracy. A rather practical innovation seen nowadays in Thimphu is the use of white cotton cuff and collar pieces that simulate a tögo, but can be changed and washed easily.



*Fig. 14*
*Bhutanese officials at an archery match. Archery is the national sport, practiced with both traditional bamboo and imported compound bows. Some men are dressed in locally-woven plaid fabrics, while others wear* go *made of imported polyester and wool knits*

*Go* (garment, coat) (Fig.14)
Man's robe

*a. Ground:* cotton, raw silk, or, formerly, nettle cloth

*Pattern*: cotton, raw silk, and silk; now also metallic yarns

(1) Warp-faced plain weave (e.g., *samkhongma, bura serthra, pangtsi)*

(2) Warp-faced plain weave with two-faced supplementary-warp patterning (e.g., *aikapur)*

(3) Warp-faced plain weave with both supplementary-warp patterning and single-faced supplementary-weft patterning using discontinuous yarns (e.g., certain *aikapur*)

*b. Ground:* Wool; plain or twill weave (e.g., *marthra, serthra*)

Imported silk brocade, cotton, polyester, and other fabrics

The go is a full-length robe that overlaps in front. It is secured with ties at each side, then folded into two wide pleats from

the hips toward the back, and then bloused above a narrow belt so that the hem hangs at the knees. Traditionally eating utensils, boxes of betel nut and lime, and daggers are carried in this exaggerated pouch formed by the blousing. Formerly, even noblemen went bare-legged and barefoot. While traveling or on special occasions, however, the well-to-do wore decorated leather and felt boots secured around the upper calf with narrow, woven ties. Today, Western shoes or ankle boots are common everyday wear, and Bhutanese boots are seen with formal dress. Of course, socks must be worn with Western footwear, and, typically, the Bhutanese choose colorful argyle knee socks! In cold weather, men sometimes wear long johns or trousers underneath their robes, too.

The length at which a man wears his robe is dictated traditionally by his social status. Ordinary citizens wear their go above the knees as a sign of humility, high officials wear theirs covering the knees, and His Majesty's robe may fall nearly to mid-calf length. Although this convention is no longer strictly observed, it is still unseemly to wear a go as long as the king's, and whenever Bhutan's supreme religious leader is in residence in Thimphu, men take care to wear their robes at the correct length.

Go are made from many of the same textiles as kira, fabrics now seen throughout the country, but once worn mainly in the regions where they were produced. The quintessential man's robe is made from one of the aikapur, the striped, raw-silk textiles from eastern Bhutan; only aikapur menthag is reserved for women's dress. Men's robes require three panels *(bjang)* of fabric, plus a slightly smaller fourth panel, whereas women's costumes are made from just three panels. The panels are cut, pieced, and joined in such a manner that any warp stripes are oriented vertically in the finished garment, rather than horizontally as they would be in a kira.

Plaid patterns from central and eastern Bhutan are also popular for men's robes. Many variations exist, but they are always based on one of two designs: *marthra* (red design), a varicolored plaid on a maroon field; or *serthra* (yellow design), a black, yellow, and white plaid on a rust-red or orange field. Serthra originally was from eastern Bhutan, where variations of the pattern were woven of raw silk on backstrap looms. Raw-silk serthra is still produced, but nowadays this plaid is more often woven of wool. Marthra, also called *tsangthra* (design from Tsang), was first introduced from southern Tibet as a trade textile, made of wool and produced in narrow lengths on a horizontal loom.[38] Lengths of both plaid woolens are sold in rolls ready to be cut, stitched and lined.

Another favorite for men's robes is *adha marthra*, a cotton plain weave showing blue, green, red, yellow, and black warp stripes (for women's dress, however, this fabric is out of style these days). Like the adha rachung pattern, which it somewhat resembles, this textile originally came from Adhang in Wangdiphodrang District. Once it seems to have had special appeal, for a Bhutanese folk-song describes "beautiful adha marthra" as the dress of the king. Other textiles from Adhang are mentioned in lists of gifts presented by the state in the mid-1700s, revealing that weaving from this area has been admired for several centuries.[39]

Southeastern Bhutan produces other cotton fabrics from which go are made. One traditional example is *samkhongma* (Sh), which has narrow red and blue warp stripes on a white field. *Pangtsi*, a red-and-black plaid on white, is associated with Assam but produced locally, too. A similar, more intricate plaid known as *mondré* (Sh; Bhutanese dress) was formerly fashionable in the southeast; *kamthagthawo* (multicolored weaving) is another pattern from the region. Today mainly older men in rural areas wear these fabrics, many of which are now used more widely for covering cushions, lining garments and other such purposes.

There is evidence that men's dress once varied from region to region and included several costumes. A text from the first half of the eighteenth century, for example, mentions "local articles of dress" associated with a king of eastern Bhutan imprisoned at Punakha in western Bhutan; this reference suggests that eastern Bhutanese had identifiable costumes or, at least, specialized textiles at that time.[40] Could this refer to aikapur, an example of which is seen in the painting of this general period mentioned above?

Samuel Davis, a young Englishman



*Left:*
*Fig. 15*
*The old man is wearing a white shoulder sash* (kamne), *as required for commoners inside the dzongs. Very young children do not have to wear sashes*
*(Photo: R. Chavda)*

who visited western Bhutan in 1783, sketched watercolors showing no less than *four* types of men's dress. Some citizens are garbed in *pakhi*, costumes rarely seen today, woven of nettle fiber and worn crossed over the chest. A typical soldier, however, is dressed in "a prodigious deal of loose clothing...: besides the common mantle, he wears very often a blanket, or thick quilted jacket." The "common mantle" sometimes appears to be a sleeveless, knee-length tunic, worn over a shirt and belted at the waist. Elsewhere, it is a plain, long-sleeved go, which Davis also calls a "jacket or tunic," worn over short trousers and hanging to the knees.[41] Most of these western Bhutanese costumes must have been made of nettle fiber or cotton. All lack patterning and only a few garments are colored, notably the *kamne*, or shoulder sashes (described below).[42]

For comparison with the images recorded by Davis in the 1780s one may look at the photographs taken by J.C. White in the early 1900s. Although many of White's subjects are high officials and court attendants rather than common citizens, one can see that men's ordinary dress is the go. The array of costume fabrics seen is far greater, no doubt partly because the photographs document the fashions of the nobility, but also because many were taken in central Bhutan where well-developed weaving traditions existed. Wool and raw silk were available to weavers, particularly at the court, and local trade with Tibet was a source of other textiles and influence. The tantalizing images in old paintings, journals, and photographs invite a closer study of men's regional costumes, some of which apparently disappeared in the nineteenth century.

*Kamne* (properly, *kabne;* covering) (Fig.15)
Man's ceremonial shoulder sash
Cotton or raw silk; slightly warp-faced plain weave

On formal occasions, in monasteries, and in the vicinity of the dzongs, all Bhutanese men, except monks, are required to wear a *kamne*. Traditionally woven of raw silk, this shoulder sash measures about four feet by ten feet and has very long fringes at each end. It consists of two or three panels joined in the warp direction, depending on the color of the sash. The kamne is draped over the left shoulder, passed around the back and brought around so it hangs very low under the right arm, and then carried across the torso and over the left shoulder again. On approaching the king and other high officials, a Bhutanese man grasps the front end of the sash in his right hand and sweeps it forward off his shoulder to the ground as he bows low.

The color of the kamne indicates the wearer's rank, unbleached white being for commoners. Village headmen wear a variation whose white center panel is flanked by panels of deep red (*khamar*, red piece of cloth). Solid maroon sashes (*buramap*, red raw silk) are awarded with the title *dasho* to senior officials in a special ceremony conducted by His Majesty.[43] Recently, white sashes with narrow red warp stripes and red sashes with white warp stripes have been introduced for officials of intermediate grade. Orange sashes are worn by those of ministerial rank, and blue by members of the Royal Advisory Council. Finally, saffron-hued sashes *(liwang)* are reserved for His Majesty and for the Je Khenpo, Bhutan's supreme religious authority.

One of the most distinctive and un-

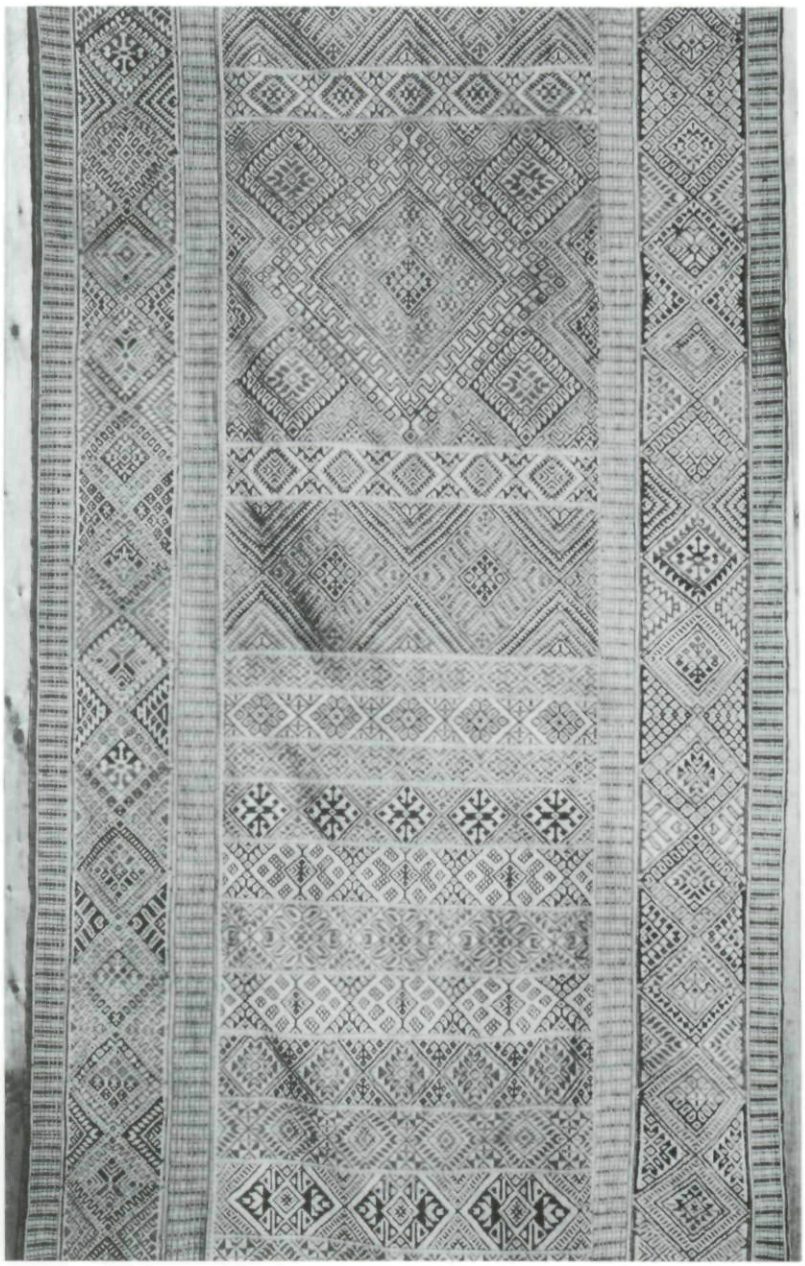


*Fig. 16*
Chaksi pangkheb. *Raw silk on unbleached cotton. The large diamond decorates the center of this long textile*

usual features of Bhutanese men's dress, which is otherwise similar to the Tibetan style, the kamne is clearly related to the shoulder cloth or shawl that in other Himalayan Buddhist areas is worn only by monks. The link with monastic tradition, however, is usually not remarked on by Bhutanese, who seldom offer explanations for the origin of the kamne as laymen's dress. The custom probably developed in the 1600s, when religious and secular authority first were exercised jointly from the dzongs. Before assuming office, high lay officials had to take certain monastic vows, and some even received religious names.[44] Monastic rules were strictly observed by all on the dzong premises, where even today women are forbidden to remain after dusk. Apparently, in deference to the monastic surroundings, officials living close to the monks, as well as citizens visiting the dzong on business, were required to wear kamne. Watercolors of the 1780s show that the garment was already worn universally by that time.[45]

Other customs in the region support this hypothesis. In Tibet, for example, ceremonial shawls were donned by laymen who had taken the first monastic vows. In eastern Nepal today, certain Buddhist lamas who are permitted to marry and maintain a household use a red-and-white shoulder sash that is draped like a Bhutanese kamne. Ladakhi men wear a similar distinctive textile across their shoulders in folk dances and on other occasions. Only in Bhutan did this monk's garment evolve into a specialized and integral part of the laity's national dress.[46]

## *Selected Accessory Textiles*

*Chaksi pangkheb* (hand-wash lap cover) (Fig.16)
Multipurpose ceremonial textile
*Ground:* cotton or raw silk
*Pattern:* raw silk, silk, or cotton
Two-faced and double-faced patterning with continuous supplementary wefts, and supplementary-warp patterning, on a slightly warp-faced plain-weave foundation

Exhibiting features that recall hand-loomed fabrics from northeast India and Southeast Asia, these intricately patterned textiles are primarily decorative and ceremonial. Although the textile's name refers to its occasional function as a "napkin," the honorific character of the Bhutanese phrase indicates that use was restricted to the well-to-do and to lamas. Covered with patterning from end to end, *chaksi pangkheb* are clearly impractical for everyday use in an ordinary home.

Chaksi pangkheb are woven on a back-strap loom as two discrete textiles. One is embellished lavishly with two-faced pat-

terning similar to that on women's cummerbunds. The fabric shows row after row of repeating pattern bands of the type described under kera, usually executed in two colors and arranged in a highly formalistic manner. Toward the center of the textile is a large diamond, composed of narrow bands of repeating geometric patterns. This auspicious, central diamond functions as an axis of symmetry for the overall design.[47] The second textile, equal in size, shows narrow bands of warp stripes and two-faced supplementary-warp patterning, flanking wider bands of two-faced supplementary-weft patterning. This length is cut in two along the warp after weaving. The resulting halves are then joined in the warp direction to the two selvages of the first textile. End fringes of the chaksi pangkheb are left six to eight inches long.

The most typical color scheme in chaksi pangkheb is red and blue on a white ground. A number of striking examples, however, show yellow, gold, green, and blue patterning on a maroon or red ground. These generally were intended for ecclesiastic use, as reds and golds are the colors of the Buddhist clergy. Chaksi pangkheb with blue grounds also exist. Regardless of the color scheme, patterns consist of similar design components arranged in a standard format. The finest examples of chaksi pangkheb were once described as "being worth ten *matram*," an early Bhutanese coin *(matram chungma chaksi pangkheb)*.[48]

Chaksi pangkheb are most commonly kept in homes for occasions when lamas are called to conduct ceremonies. At these times, one textile may be hung on the wall behind the lama's seat and another offered to cover his lap, but informants agreed that chaksi pangkheb are not sat upon. These textiles are also among the accoutrements carried by attendants of senior officials and the king in formal processions. The first personal attendant preceding His Majesty carries a silver water pot in his right hand and a folded chaksi pangkheb over his left shoulder. High officials have a similar attendant who carries the textile draped over his left forearm.

*Pangkheb* (lap cover) (Fig.17)
Multipurpose textile used for carrying bundles, covering doorways, and other functions

*Ground:* cotton; sometimes nettle fiber(?)

*Pattern:* cotton or raw silk

Two-faced patterning with continuous and discontinuous supplementary wefts, and two-faced supplementary-warp patterning, on a warp-faced plain-weave foundation

Identical to the chaksi pangkheb in format, the *pangkheb* is more modestly patterned and usually made of less fine materials. It displays a central diamond design, but is generally distinguished from chaksi pangkheb by having localized patterning rather than selvage-to-selvage embellishment in the field. The colors used are again the traditional red and blue or black on an



*Fig. 17*
*A cotton* pangkheb *used to secure a child to a woman's back. (Compare with the much more elaborate* chaksi pangkheb, *Fig. 16.) A blanket made of* yathra *cushions the child on this woman's back. Her belt is the traditional wide panel decorated with red and black patterning*



*Fig. 18*
*Women at a festival, dressed in their best clothes. In the foreground is a contemporary* phechung, *or small carrying bag, decorated with repeating diamonds. The woman has a* rachung *draped around her neck and wears a* tögo *(jacket) of imported polyester silk*

unbleached white field.

Altogether a more utilitarian textile, the pangkheb may serve as a lap cover, but is used more frequently for sitting on, covering cushions, carrying bundles or as a doorway hanging. Door covers *(goré)* of this sort are found throughout Tibetan culture areas of the Himalayas. The hangings are edged with appliqué of narrow blue or red cotton cloth; strips of fabric may also be stitched down the center of the textile in the warp direction and across the middle in the weft direction as well. Finally, the goré is backed with another textile before adding a cotton valance as trim at the top end of the hanging.

Formerly, one specialized use of pangkheb was for rain cloaks worn by lamas. These textiles were known as *chhure* (rain cloth) *pangkheb,* but do not seem to have been characterized by any particular patterning or other features. Until the 1950s, a certain style of pangkheb (Sh: *dzong sari*) served as a widespread form of tax payment in southeastern Bhutan. Examples sent to the dzongs generally were woven as an identical pair of textiles meant to be joined along one selvage, rather than as a pair where one textile would be cut and joined to the selvages of the other. These pangkheb are invariably of unbleached cotton and sparsely patterned, but are similar in final appearance to other pangkheb.

*Phechung* (small bag)(Fig.18)
Bag for carrying loads or personal items
*Ground:* cotton or nettle cloth
*Pattern*: cotton or raw silk (possibly wool and nettle fiber as well?); now also acrylic yarns
Single-faced patterning with continuous and discontinuous supplementary wefts on a slightly warp-faced plain-weave foundation; sometimes single-faced patterning where yarns are twined and wrapped *(tima)*

Woven as one continuous length on a backstrap loom, *phechung* fabric is removed from the loom before the warp yarns are cut. The textile is cut across the weft into two panels of equal size which are then joined along one selvage and folded in half. Finally the outer selvages are sewn together to fashion a bag, purse-size or larger. Cotton, woolen, or leather straps are attached to the sides of the bag, which may then be closed by folding the open end (mouth) over to one side.

Usually made of durable wool, heavy cotton, or tough nettle fiber, the bags are rather coarsely woven as a rule. Auspicious swastikas flanked by linear and geometric pattern bands appear on each face of the bag, the original length of fabric having been woven in such a way that the designs are identical. Traditional color schemes are



*Fig. 19*
Bündi. *Raw silk on unbleached cotton*

red and blue or black on unbleached white. Kurtö District is well-known for phechung and *bündi* (below), which are embellished there with the same supplementary-weft patterning *(sapma* and *tima)* as kushuthara. Hence their local names, *kushu phechung* and *kushu bogdri.*

Like the chaksi pangkheb, the mundane phechung figures in ceremonial processions escorting His Majesty and high officials. No less than four attendants, two walking on each side of the king's horse, carry phechung; the strap is worn over the left shoulder and passes under the right arm so the bag itself is positioned at the attendant's back. In these ornately patterned bags are His Majesty's teacups, official seals, and other sundries. Senior officials have the privilege of retaining two attendants who carry phechung.

*Bündi* (round receptacle) (Fig.19)
Textile for wrapping and carrying large bundles

*Ground:* cotton or nettle fiber
*Pattern:* cotton, raw silk, and sometimes wool (also nettle fiber?); now acrylic yarns

Single-faced patterning with continuous and discontinuous supplementary wefts on a slightly warp-faced plain-weave foundation; sometimes patterning where the wefts are twined and wrapped *(tima)*

Similar to phechung, *bündi* are made from one length of fabric, this time cut into three equal-sized panels that are sewn together in the warp direction to form a textile about four feet square. The center panel invariably shows a large swastika, with symmetrical diamonds and geometric patterns on the side panels. Cotton, woolen or leather straps are sewn to two diagonally opposite corners of the bündi for tying up the packed bundle of clothing, bedding, grain or other goods. Ritual cymbals and



*Fig. 20*
*This woman's jacket is made of panels of* yathra, *the patterned woolen for which Bumthang in central Bhutan is famous. A* rachung *holds the child on her back*

other religious instruments or objects may also be stored wrapped in small bündi.

Bündi from Kurtö, properly called kushu bogdri, appear to be similar in format and design to a utilitarian textile of the Sherdukpen people in neighboring Arunachal Pradesh. The Sherdukpen's *bogre* is a carrying cloth or sort of knapsack whose central motif is always a swastika surrounded by secondary patterns in the same colors used on Kurtö bündi. As mentioned above with respect to women's jackets and tunic-style apparel, the production of similar textiles and their related nomenclature point to Bhutanese links with this area from an early date.[49]

*Yathra* (Bu: mountain design) (Fig.20)
Multipurpose textile used for rain cloaks, mattress covers and jackets

*Ground:* wool

*Pattern:* wool; now also acrylic yarns

Plain 2/2 and other twill weaves with single-faced patterning using discontinuous supplementary wefts

Staggered 2/2 diamond, staggered 2/2 vertical herringbone, and other twill weaves, sometimes two types in a single textile, with single-faced patterning using discontinuous supplementary wefts

A particularly striking textile, *yathra* is a heavy woolen fabric for which the Bumthang region of central Bhutan is famous. Now woven mainly on horizontal looms, but formerly made on backstrap looms, uncut lengths of yathra measure two feet by ten or more feet long and show several patterns. The traditional palette of naturally dyed yarns is rich and warm: rainbow hues of pink, plum and maroon; a handful of blues and greens; with accents in white and gold. These colors age beautifully, so the loveliest examples of yathra are those that have been used for some time. Once used mainly for blankets and cloaks, yathra is now also made into jackets that are very popular with Bhutanese women and with Westerners who find them in the bazaars of Darjeeling, Kalimpong, and Kathmandu.

There are many variations of yathra; all show single-faced supplementary-weft patterning on either a plain-colored ground or a ground striped with variegated wefts. The bold designs, generally arranged in horizontal rows, include individual motifs familiar from other Bhutanese textiles: diamonds, stars, swastikas, "wheels," "scissors," and floral designs. Pattern wefts



*Right:*
*Fig. 21*
*A shepherd wearing a* charkab *(rain cloak), made of* yathra

forming these motifs are paired and quite thick; they show variable float spans, and may be laid into the shed of the ground weft at intervals or interworked diagonally on what will be the finished face of the textile. Traditionally, yathra with a dark brown ground is reputed to come from the Chhumey Valley, while yathra with predominantly white and rust grounds is said to come from the Ura Valley farther east. Both types are now made in the Chokhor region around Jakar Dzong as well. Names of designs are usually consistent throughout Bumthang District, with a few variations in the Ura dialect.

There are two very customary uses for yathra:

*Charkab* (rain covering) (Fig.21)

Charkab generally are made of yathra that shows rows of single-faced patterning depicting diamonds, stars, and flowers, alternating with bands of narrow weft stripes. A different-colored ground weft is used in each successive area of the textile where patterning occurs. Woven as a single length, the yathra is cut across the weft into three panels of equal size. These are joined together in the warp direction, and then the sides and ends of the textile are hemmed or trimmed with piping. Charkab are draped around the shoulders and secured in front with cloth ties or a pin. Nowadays, plastic sheets and raincoats are available even in the hills, and charkab are worn mainly by the older generation.

The center panel of a charkab, like that of a chaksi pangkheb, usually features an auspicious diamond in one of the pattern areas. The diamond is executed in a "checkerboard" color scheme composed of triangular sections. Known as *thrikheb* (throne cover), this design resembles patchwork patterns of the same name seen on silk textiles used around lamas' seats, and checkerboard designs painted on the fronts of shrines in monasteries. When rendered in fabric or in the border patterning of kushuthara (where it is called *phoob*), this patchwork is believed to bring long life to the wearer or user of the textile. One Kurtep weaver said that a woman desiring safe delivery of a healthy child often invokes this blessing by stitching a patchwork of old scraps, thus giving them new life, or by incorporating the design into a fabric she is weaving.

Relatively recent yathra shows a proliferation of individual designs, an increase in the overall busyness of color and pattern, and a looser weave than older textiles. Earlier twentieth-century examples are notable for fewer rows of patterning, for a more restrained color scheme, and for very tight weaves. It was, in part, this tight twill, which forms an exquisite diamond pattern of its own in the weft-striped ground, that helped make traditional yathra water-resistant, if not quite waterproof. Some older charkab show just one motif repeated in rows of patterning at intervals throughout the textile. When the motif is a simple cross, the yathra bears an unmistakable resemblance to *jalu* (Tib: *thigthra*), one of the narrow woolen fabrics formerly imported from Tibet. Jalu is also patterned with rows of crosses between bands of weft striping and is mainly used for women's dresses (see kira).

*Denkheb* (seat/mattress cover)

Recent *denkheb* typically are made of a different type of yathra with a plain, dark ground. This yathra shows the same design motifs, used singly or in combinations, but arranged in one of two novel ways: either widely spaced in horizontal rows or within a diamond-shaped lattice pattern that extends across the entire textile and frames individual motifs. Denkheb showing a lattice are often bordered on four sides with a meander or other pattern, creating a resemblance to Tibetan and Chinese pile rugs that are popular among the well-to-do. These variations in denkheb yathra design have developed in the twentieth century, and their introduction is remembered by some older Bhutanese.

Like charkab, denkheb are made from a single length of yathr—regardless of pattern—that is cut in half across the weft. The two panels are then joined in the warp direction, and the ends and sides of the textile are turned under or bound. Denkheb yathra is woven in such a way that lattice designs and border patterns, if any, will match along the center seam when the two panels are sewn together.

Denkheb serve as seat covers in homes where the typical furniture consists of cush-

ions or low, box-frame "couches," on top of which are placed animal skins and handloomed textiles to be sat upon during the day and rearranged as bedding at night. Denkheb may be spread directly on the floor, like a rug, for sitting on, or taken on travels and picnics for the same purpose. When old and worn, these textiles are cut up and used as saddle padding.

## *Conclusion*

The richness of Bhutan's weaving traditions is immediately appreciated, even by a casual visitor. Whether among the jostling crowds at the Sunday market in Thimphu or with a solitary trader and his packhorses on a mountain trail, one finds textiles to admire everywhere. The Bhutanese love of decoration and innate sense of color, apparent in monastery wall paintings and in the woodwork of many homes, pervades the country's looms as well. The patience of a woman beginning to weave a dress that will take a year to complete, or the appreciation of a senior official for how his wife dyed her yarn just the right shade of maroon for his go—these attitudes speak of pride in a national tradition rarely found elsewhere today.

Bhutan's many languages and dialects reflect the diverse origins of her people, who have been united, politically and religiously, as a Buddhist state since the 1600s. Indigenous textiles are just as varied, even though many now have a distinct "national" identity. Much remains to be learned about these weavings. For example, the format and patterning of many textiles allude to cultural links of the past, showing definite similarities to fabrics produced along the northeastern frontier of India and in Southeast Asia—resemblances that call for further study in order to be explained. Looms and precise weaving and dyeing techniques have not yet been described. The sources of present Bhutanese design include Tibetan Buddhist iconography as well as mundane items of everyday life; incorporated into weavings, patterns reveal regional "vocabularies" that charm outsiders but remain to be understood. Since few Westerners visited Bhutan until recently, indigenous texts should be examined for clues to the changes in fashion, which have clearly taken place over time; preliminary readings have yielded references to regional textiles and records of tax payments, as well as to lists of imported and locally woven yard goods and accessory textiles that figured as state gifts or public distributions. Legends and folk songs reflect popular traditions and beliefs that sometimes likewise shed light on weaving, designs, and costumes.

In Bhutan today, weaving thrives as a sophisticated and highly respected craft whose origins, historical development, and regional diversity have yet to be explored and documented. Though some parts of the story have undoubtedly been lost forever, weaving and fashions are evolving now as they have over the centuries and promise to take on new forms. Little known outside the country, yet an integral and vital part of the culture, Bhutan's textiles deserve serious study to foster a better understanding of these artful—and changing—handloom traditions.


## *Acknowledgments*

*I am indebted to many people, particularly in Bhutan, for assistance in preparing this paper. Some are acknowledged in the footnotes, but the contributions of those whose names do not appear are not belittled by lack of specific mention.*


## *Notes*

1. Early travelers' accounts, which provide valuable descriptions of textile production and use in Tibet and other Himalayan regions, are very few for Bhutan, which was visited by only a handful of Westerners prior to the 1970s. A summary of Bhutanese history is provided in the introduction to Michael Aris' *Views of Medieval Bhutan* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1982), 11-17.

2. Most Bhutanese, except for some young people in Thimphu and other towns, wear traditional dress by preference. To forestall a change in custom among a highly visible group that might prefer to adopt Western styles, the royal government has decreed that all civil servants must wear national dress in their offices. His Majesty the King sets a personal example by being seen only in Bhutanese dress—even when playing basketball!

3. Françoise Pommaret-Imaeda, "History of Ancient Bhutan [seventh-eighteenth centuries]," 1987 (forthcoming publication by the Department of Education, Thimphu), 16-19.

4. For centuries up until 1826, adjacent Assam State in India was ruled by the Ahoms, people of Thai origin who migrated through the Shan area of northern Burma. On Assam as a corridor between Southeast Asia and southern Asia, see for example T.C.

Sharma and D.N. Majumdar, *Eastern Himalayas: A Study in Anthropology and Tribalism* (New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1979), 22-40, 102-15; and Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf, *Highlanders of Arunachal Pradesh: Anthropological Research in North-East India* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., 1982), 2-7.

5. I am greatly indebted to Mattiebelle Gittinger, Research Associate in Southeast Asian Textiles at The Textile Museum, Washington, D.C., for her assistance in identifying, clarifying, and confirming structural characteristics of certain textiles discussed in this paper. Ann P. Rowe, Curator of Western Hemisphere Collections at The Textile Museum, Washington, D.C., also provided valuable guidance on the terminology with which structures are described. Susan S. Bean, Chief Curator at the Peabody Museum, Salem, Massachusetts, was a most helpful reader.

6. Assamese raw silk (called by its Assamese name, *endi*, or by the general Bhutanese term bura) is not a recent import. In 1905, the raw silk being used by royal weavers in Bumthang was mainly "obtained from Assam and the northern hills [of India]"; see J. C. White, "Castles in the Air: Experiences and Journeys in Unknown Bhutan," *National Geographic Magazine*, April 1914, 428. Eighteenth-century Bhutanese texts also mention imported Assamese raw-silk yard goods. On Bhutanese raw-silk production, see Sasuke Nakao and Keiji Nishioka, *Flowers of Bhutan* (Tokyo: Asahi Shimbun Publishing Co., 1984), 134-35.

7. The royal government considers Australian wool a temporary input and is exploring means of increasing local production.

8. Some informants recall the appearance in Bumthang of horizontal looms from Tibet as late as the 1950s. On these looms, see Philip Denwood, *The Tibetan Carpet* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, Ltd., 1974), 32-33, 88-89; on backstrap looms of the region, see 25-26. Throughout Bhutan the word *pangthag* is sometimes used for backstrap looms, but more accurately refers to any fabric woven on this type of loom.

9. The loom is called *shogo thagshing* (paper loom). Originally, the cards were made of layers of handmade Bhutanese paper pasted together into "cardboard" or of calfskin; now they are fashioned from almost anything, including X-ray film!

10. This group (called *dakpa* or *brokpa*) is ethnically similar to, but distinct from, neighboring peoples in Tawang, Arunachal Pradesh, India.

11. This fabric is called *yüra* or *zocha* in western Bhutan and *zangru* (Sh) in the eastern part of the country. Popularly worn up to the nineteenth century, it is still used for clothing in some regions of Bhutan, like Shemgang. The nettle, from which eastern Nepalese also spin a fiber, is mainly *Girardinia palmata*; see Nakao and Nishioka, 132. No specimens have been collected, but other nettles may also exist in Bhutan; on the use of fiber from the nettle *Rhea nivea* in neighboring Arunachal Pradesh in India, for example, see Verrier Elwin, *The Art of the North-East Frontier of India* (Shillong: North-East Frontier Agency, 1959), 69 (among Monpas and Sherdukpens) and 131 (among Mishmis).

12. Nettle cloth may have been woven in southwestern Bhutan at one time, and woolens are still made by herders in northern Ha, Paro, and Thimphu Districts; a few areas in Wangdiphodrang (Gogona, Sephu, Phobjikha, and Adhang) likewise have looms. The latter communities share a language close to that of Bumthang, suggesting that these people migrated to their present homes from farther east and brought a knowledge of weaving with them. This information courtesy of Françoise Pommaret-Imaeda, Thimphu, who also provided other valuable information and references.

13. Men rarely weave, although they spin yak wool with a drop spindle and stitch appliqué panels for use in ecclesiastic and ceremonial textiles. Most professional tailors, who sew lengths of woven fabric into finished textiles, are men, too. The same division of labor exists in Ladakh and parts of northern Nepal.

14. On lac production in the 1890s, see J. C. White, *Sikkim and Bhutan: 21 Years on the North-East Frontier* (reprint, New Delhi: Vivek Publishing House, 1971), 190. On trade, see Sir C.R. Markham, *Narratives of the Mission of George Bogle to Tibet* (London: Trübner & Co., 1876), 313. For identification of Bhutanese madder, see Nakao and Nishioka, 134. On historical madder trade, see *Exploration in Tibet and Neighboring Regions, 1879-1892*, Records of the Survey of India, vol. 8, pt. 2 (Dehra Dun, 1915), 360.

15. The term *rum* is applied throughout the Himalayas and Tibet to a variety of plants used for blue dye. In some areas of Bhutan, the plant is "Assam indigo" *(Strobilanthes cusia)*; see Nakao and Nishioka, 139. *S. flaccidifolius* is a source of blue in nearby regions of northeastern India; see Elwin, 36.

16. *Zhungkhe* specimens from Kalimpong, not far from the Bhutanese border in India, were identified as *Symplocos racemosa* at the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. Nakao and Nishioka identify *pangtsi* as *S. thaeafolia* (p. 126), and *zim* as *Symplocos* sp. (p. 138).

17. A sample of *dorum* purchased in a Bhutanese market proved to be indigo mixed with quartz and other minerals (analysis courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution).

18. For example, see White, "Castles," 434-35, for photographs of the royal family and female attendants. Photographs in private family albums examined in Bhutan confirm that the wearing of a white inner jacket rather than a blouse was a custom not restricted to the aristocracy.

19. Both jackets are known as *töthung* (Sh, short jacket), the local equivalent of the Dzongkha word *tögo*. The same term is used in Brokpakha, the language spoken by herders in Merak Sakteng. Patterned outer jackets are more precisely called *zukthya töthung* or *nornang tööhung*.

20. See, for an illustration, Bert Kerr Todd, "Bhutan, Land of the Thunder Dragon," *National Geographic Magazine*, December 1952, 728. The young girl is wearing a raw-silk *aikapur kira* under a woolen *marthra kira*.

21. A substantial textile trade was one manifestation of the strong links between the Bumthang region and Tibet. Over high passes, raw-silk and cotton fabrics of Bhutanese and Indian manufacture were exchanged for rolls of narrow woolen cloth made in south central Tibet. The fashion among Bumthang women of wearing a striped woolen apron (Bu: *dongkheb;* Tib: *pangden*) over their *kira* was probably introduced from Tibet, just as the Tibetan-style blouse was adopted by the Bhutanese nobility of this area.

22. At least ten distinct types of cotton fabric

were woven as tax cloth to be sent to the *dzongs*. A complex protocol existed for calculating the fabrics' values according to the quality of weave and degree of patterning, as well as the number of textiles that made up a particular set of goods. Some tax fabrics were then distributed to government monasteries for making lamp wicks or lining cushions; others, like *logo pöntshe* (annual clothing, king's measure), provided clothing for menial laborers at the *dzongs*.

23. *Aikapur* is originally a Sharchop word for all costume textiles decorated with supplementary-warp patterning. Among Dzongkha speakers in Thimphu, however, *aikapur* normally refers only to the particular pattern eastern Bhutanese would call *aikapur jadrima*, yellow and white supplementary-warp pattern bands alternating with colorfully striped plain weave.

24. On Mishmi textiles, for example, see Elwin, 37ff. Some primary designs and the characteristic hatched crossbars seen in *aikapur* pattern bands are also found in northern Lao weaving, but the similarities cannot be explained at present. See illustrations in Patricia Cheesman, "The Antique Weaving of the Lao Neua," *Arts of Asia*, July-August 1982, 120-25.

25. Bhutanese use the term *dromchung chema* for different fabrics. In Thimphu, it refers to the *aikapur* showing red, green, yellow, and white pattern bands. In eastern Bhutan, where *aikapur* originates, however, this pattern often is considered a version of *jadrima*; there people say *dromchung chema* is an obsolete *aikapur* whose designs did resemble the "little boxes" alluded to in the name. No examples of this pattern could be examined. See note 26 as well.

26. Some *pesar kira* show warp stripes and scattered supplementary-weft-float patterns, but lack supplementary-warp pattern bands. In eastern Bhutan, designs of this sort are called *khoptang rigpa* (Sh; surface or outside design) in reference to the single-faced patterning or *tongpang rigpa* (Sh; design in blank space). In Thimphu, these *kira* sometimes are known as *dromchung chema* (having little boxes) in allusion to the localized patterns, but this term is rather broadly used nowadays. See note 25 also.

27. A separate group of *kushuthara* and other *kira* show center panels with a different field color than the outer panels. It is not clear whether these garments were traditionally given a special name or not; nowadays, they are usually called by the predominant field color. Bartholomew uses the term *lhase sawthara* for a *kira* with a white center panel flanked by blue side panels; this phrase appears to be a corruption of *laseseu thara*. See Mark Bartholomew, *Thunder Dragon Textiles from Bhutan* (Kyoto: Shikosha Publishing Co., 1985), pl. 4. From *laseni* (to mix), *laseseu* can mean mixed colors, but is reportedly not used to describe a *kira*. Other examples show a blue center panel flanked with white or red panels.

28. As the political officer in charge of Sikkim, Bhutan, and parts of Tibet, John Claude White first traveled to Bhutan in late 1905. He attended King Ugyen Wangchuck's coronation in 1907 as the head of a mission representing the government of British India. For the court weavers, see White, "Castles," 427.

29. Although the published literature remarks that this technique has been lost, experienced Kurtep weavers who were shown photographs said it can be reproduced and is sometimes used on contemporary *kushung*, which can occasionally be seen in the Thimphu market.

30. Other terms informants used were *kibu* (in Kurtö), *paga* and *kushi* (in eastern Bhutan), and *gotsumma*—meaning over the head—and *kuzum* (in Bumthang).

31. A *kushung* is also said to be worn in the *meme* (grandfather) and *abi* (grandmother) dances in Shemgang and Mongar Districts, perhaps indicating that in those areas, too, the costume is associated with earlier generations.

32. Tunics of various design are still worn by a few communities in the region. Those of the women of Merak Sakteng in Tashigang are briefly discussed under *shingkha* (below). Ponchos worn by both men and women of the Taraon (Digaru) Mishmi tribe in nearby India are described by Elwin, 124-28.

33. The only instance of animal and human figures being used on a contemporary costume is among the nomadic herders of Merak Sakteng, an ethnic minority who are Buddhists, but retain very unique costumes, traditions, and practices of their own which are considered outside the mainstream of Bhutanese culture. The occurrence of animal and human figures on *kushung* and *shingkha*, as well as on women's jackets in Merak Sakteng and Tawang (India), invites further investigation, as suggested below.

34. A discussion of appliqué throne covers, hangings, and canopies is beyond the scope of this paper. These textiles associated with Vajrayana Buddhism are also used in Tibet and other Himalayan areas; examples from Bhutan are illustrated in Bartholomew and in Barbara Adams, *Traditional Bhutanese Textiles* (Bangkok: White Orchid Press, 1984).

35. White, *Sikkim and Bhutan*, 168.

36. Michael Aris discusses the close affinity between the languages of Bumthang and Kurtö and the speech of the Monpa in northern Tawang, concluding that natives of these areas were originally two branches of the same people. See Michael Aris, *Bhutan* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, Ltd., 1979), xv-xvi, 121-22. Moreover, certain communities in Tawang celebrate a festival whose name is the same as that of the Kurtö festival. This event honors the same god and involves similar conventions with regard to dress, although it differs in some ritual aspects.

37. Reproduced in Aris, *Views of Medieval Bhutan*, 19. As an authentic record, the painting as a whole, probably executed in Calcutta in 1775, must be cautiously interpreted. However, as Aris notes, "many details in the picture are individually authentic," no doubt because the scene was painted on the basis of participants' accounts, and because the mission depicted included an artist who made numerous sketches. The photographs cited are those referenced in note 18 above.

38. The Tibetans possibly produced *marthra* solely for export to Bhutan, knowing that the Bhutanese were fond of plaid patterns, for the textile does not seem to have been sought after in Tibet. At the Bumthang court in the early twentieth century, rolls of narrow Tibetan woolens (to make into garments) were distributed routinely to junior officials. Information courtesy of Dasho Shingkhar Lam, Thimphu.

39. See the list of gifts presented by the thir-

teenth Druk Desi Sherab Wangchuk to the Shabdrung and Gyelre Tulkus in 1747; among the distributions from the state treasury to these important lamas were *athang khamar* (*sic;* a type of sash). In Yontan Thaye, *Chos-rgyal chen-po shes-rab dbang-phyug-gi dge-ba'i cho-ga rab-tu gsal-ba'i gtam mu-tig do-shal* (Account of the virtuous deeds of the thirteenth Druk Desi Sherab Wangchuk [r. 1744-1763]); block print (N.p., n.d.), folio 32b. Translation kindness of Yoshiro Imaeda, Thimphu, and Minyak Tulku, Paro.

40. Information and citation from Françoise Pommaret-Imaeda, Thimphu.

41. On *pakhi*, see Aris, *Views of Medieval Bhutan*, 64-66; on soldiers' dress, 88-90.

42. See Aris, *Views of Medieval Bhutan*, 18-21, for a painting (ca. 1775) showing another example of this obsolete style of dress. One man (center rear) is wearing an *aikapur go*. The figure on the left, however, is a British emissary in "local dress" given to him by the Deb Raja of Bhutan. Most interesting, his is a different costume, unfortunately half-hidden by a ceremonial sash. Three other men shown are in robes that could be either Bhutanese or Tibetan; one robe appears to be made of the Tibetan fabric known as *thigthra* (called *jalu* by the Bhutanese).

43. These maroon *kamne* must be worn with a ceremonial sword hanging on the right hip and a narrow, patterned textile *(pata losé)* hanging from the belt on the left hip. The *pate losé* was used to secure the sword to the belt at one's back for ease in walking. A tug on this strap released the sword to its hanging position, a necessary gesture of respect when the wearer met a superior. Today, swords are only worn by senior officials in full dress or on formal occasions.

44. See Aris, *Bhutan*, 262, and Michael Aris, "'The Boneless Tongue': Alternative Voices from Bhutan in the Context of Lamaist Societies," Working Paper no. 14 (Simla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1986), 43-44.

45. See Aris, *Views of Medieval Bhutan*, 89, for a watercolor showing men wearing a *khamar* (at right) and what appear to be ordinary, white *kamne*.

46. The monk's shoulder cloth is known in Tibetan as *sen* or *lemthang*. Information courtesy of Lobsang Lhalungpa, McLean, Va., and Rick Finney, Washington, D.C.

47. On similar patterns in Mishmi textiles of northeastern India, see Elwin, 37-40. On the diamond motif in northern Lao textiles, see Cheesman, 123.

48. Information courtesy of Lopön Lam Nado, Thimphu.

49. On Sherdukpen weaving, see Elwin, 43-44.

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